

**REMARKS**

After entry of this amendment, claims 1-20 are pending in the application. Claim 1-12 have been herein amended. New claims 13-20 have been added. The above amendments and following remarks are believed to be fully responsive to the outstanding Office Action and to render all claims at issue patentably distinct over the cited references. Reconsideration of the Application is respectfully requested.

In the Office Action dated May 3, 2006, claims 1-12 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph. The Examiner contends that use of the phrase “tunnel-like” in claim 1 renders the claims indefinite. Claim 1 has been amended to delete the term from the claim. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the instant rejection be reconsidered and withdrawn.

Claims 1, 7-10, and 12 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Rehm (U.S. 2002/0056710). The rejection is respectfully traversed. Claims 8 and 9 depend either directly or indirectly from claims 2 and 3, neither of which has been rejected as being anticipated by Rehm. Since claims 8 and 9 include all of the limitations of claims 2 and 3, it respectfully submitted that Rehm does not anticipate, teach or suggest all of the elements of Applicant’s claimed invention, and it is requested that the rejection be withdrawn with respect to both claims. Claim 1 has been amended to more particularly point out and distinctly claim that each thermally conditioning facility includes a tunnel shaped cavity that is connected in parallel with the tunnel shaped cavities of the remaining thermally conditioning facilities, such that an air stream passing through one tunnel shaped cavity is prevented from passing through any of the remaining cavities, as would be the case if the cavities were fluidly connected in series. In contrast, Rehm either does not disclose two or more thermally conditioning facilities arranged in parallel, and even if it does, the thermally conditioning facilities are not arranged one above the other. Rehm shows a heating device 1 for printed circuit boards 2 with four heating lines 3 thru 6 divided into two transport levels 12 and 29. Heating lines 3 and 5 are arranged in lower transport level 12 next to each other and parallel to each other. Arranged on top of heating lines 3 and 5, the additional heating lines 4 and 6 are disposed in the upper transport level 29 (see paragraph 45 of Rehm). The Examiner

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states that each thermally conditioning facility in Rehm consists of a tunnel like space consisting of heating lines 3 and 4 (see pg. 3, lines 3 and 4 of the Office Action). Assuming this to be true, the thermally conditioning facilities would be arranged side by side, rather than one above the other. On the other hand, if the Examiner is suggesting that heating lines 3 and 4 each represent a separate thermally conditioning facility, such that they are arranged one above the other, then the two facilities are arranged in series rather than in parallel. A single stream of air passes sequentially over both heating lines 3 and 4, one after the other. This is a classical series arrangement. Since Rehm does not disclose each and every element of Applicant's claimed invention, it is respectfully requested that the instant rejection be reconsidered and withdrawn.

Claims 1-4, 6, and 8 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by DE3941134. Claim 1 has been amended to more particularly point out and distinctly claim that each thermally conditioning facility includes a tunnel shaped cavity that is connected in parallel with the tunnel shaped cavities of the remaining thermally conditioning facilities, such that an air stream passing through one tunnel shaped cavity is prevented from passing through any of the remaining cavities, as would be the case if the cavities were fluidly connected in series. In contrast, DE3941134 does not anticipate, teach or suggest the claimed combination of elements. The dryer apparatus of DE3941134 includes four continuous flow dryers 2 constructed as drying chambers 3. Ceramic goods 29 to be dried are placed on drying racks 27 and sent through the dryer apparatus 1 in the direction of arrow 35. Intermediate walls 7 divide the dryer into four chambers 3, designated as I through IV. The drying racks 27 are subdivided by a horizontal wall 14 into upper and lower parts 31 and 32 (see Fig. 2). A single stream of air 35 passes sequentially through each of the chambers (see Figs. 2 and 3). Air stream 35 enters chamber I at port 24. The air stream first passes through upper part 31 of drying rack 27 and then through lower part 32 (see Fig. 2). The air stream then enters chamber II through an opening in the lower portion of intermediate wall 7. The air stream first passes through lower portion 32 of drying rack 27 present in chamber II, then through upper portion 31. The air stream is then discharged to chamber III through port 8 (see Fig. 1) in intermediate wall 7 located between chambers II and III. Once in chamber III, the air

passes first through upper portion 31 then lower portion 32 of drying rack 27. Finally, air stream 33 passes from chamber III to chamber IV through an opening in the lower portion of the wall separating the two chambers. Once in chamber IV, the air stream first passes through lower portion 32 of drying rack 27, then through upper portion 31. At this point the air stream has completed its meandering pass through the dryer and is discharged through port 25. The single stream of air passes sequentially through the upper and lower portions of the drying racks and between the four chambers. The thermally conditioning facilities are thus clearly arranged in series, not in parallel, as suggested by the Examiner. Applicant accordingly requests that the instant rejection be reconsidered and withdrawn.

Claim 5 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over DE3941134. This rejection is respectfully traversed. It is submitted that Applicant's invention as set forth in claim 5, which depends indirectly from claim 1, patentably defines over the cited reference for the same reasons as set forth above with respect to the patentability of claim 1. Applicant accordingly requests that the instant rejection be reconsidered and withdrawn.

Claim 11 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Rehm (US 2002/0056710) in view of Archer (U.S. 4,873,107). This rejection is respectfully traversed. It is submitted that Applicant's invention as set forth in claim 11, which depends indirectly from claim 1, patentably defines over the cited references as combined by the Examiner for the same reasons as set forth above with respect to the patentability of claim 1. Applicant accordingly requests that the instant rejection be reconsidered and withdrawn.

It is submitted that this Amendment has antecedent basis in the application as originally filed, including the specification, claims and drawings, and that this Amendment does not add any new subject matter to the application. Consideration of the application as amended is requested. It is submitted that this Amendment places the application in suitable condition for allowance; notice of which is requested.

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If the Examiner feels that prosecution of the present application can be expedited by way of an Examiner's Amendment, the Examiner is invited to contact the Applicant's attorney at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

YOUNG & BASILE, P.C.

  
Daniel J. Checkowsky  
Attorney for Applicant(s)  
Registration No. 51,549  
(248) 649-3333

3001 West Big Beaver Rd., Suite 624  
Troy, Michigan 48084-3107

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